

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 292

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

November 12, 1934

ELECTION BULLETINS IN THE SIXTIES

With each approaching election there is always a keen interest shown in how a candidate runs in his local precinct, his own county, or his home city. Abraham Lincoln's remarkable race the first time he ran for public office, in which he received all but three of the 281 votes cast in his precinct, should not be considered as a typical result of all of his subsequent political efforts.

There is an old familiar biblical proverb—"A prophet is not without honor save in his own country and among his own kin." This fact seems to be true of politicians also, and especially true of those who ran for the presidency in 1860.

In this memorable campaign two of the four candidates, Lincoln and Breckinridge, were born in Kentucky, yet that state gave her electoral vote to another. Douglas, a Vermonter, was also denied the support of his native state. Bell of Tennessee was the only one of four presidential candidates who was successful in carrying his own state.

Kentucky

Early in the 1860 campaign Abraham Lincoln was conscious of the opposition in Kentucky to his candidacy. He was invited by a citizen of the county where his father and mother first went to keeping house to visit the place of his birth. He replied, "You suggest that a visit to the place of my nativity might be pleasant to me. Indeed it would." He then continued jokingly, "But would it be safe? Would not the people lynch me?"

It is quite likely that in the press of official business after the election he did not go to the trouble to learn how the voters did "lynch" him, figuratively speaking, in the very communities where his people and his wife's people lived and in the county where he was born.

In Washington County, Kentucky, both Lincoln's father and mother grew to maturity and were married. Here, for many years, several uncles and aunts of Abraham Lincoln also lived. Nevertheless, he received but one vote out of 1,566 cast in the county.

Hardin County, Kentucky, was the first home of Lincoln's parents after their marriage, and many of Lincoln's own relatives were living there in 1860. Out of a total of 2,091 votes cast, Lincoln received six.

Mary Todd, wife of Abraham Lincoln, was born in Lexington, Kentucky, and a large number of her relatives were living there in 1860. Only one vote, however, was registered for Lincoln from that district.

In Larue County, Kentucky, where Abraham Lincoln was born, only three votes were cast for the "favorite son" candidate, while Douglas, born in New England, polled more votes than the total received by all three of the southern-born candidates.

Although Lincoln fared somewhat better in his native state in the election of 1864, he must have been chagrined when he learned that Kentucky was one of but three states which gave their electoral votes to McClellan.

Indiana

In 1844 Lincoln went back to Indiana campaigning for Henry Clay and visited Spencer County, the community where he lived for fourteen years and where he first became eligible to vote. The home folks used him much better than those of his native state, and possibly his influence had something to do with Clay receiving a good majority in the county.

When the election of 1860 came around, although some vicious stories, later proven to be untrue, were circulated about Lincoln, he managed to carry Spencer County by 141 votes over his nearest competitor and his early home township by 145 to 96 over Douglas.

Lincoln always seemed to have more confidence in the political support of Indiana than in either of the other commonwealths in which he had lived. She stood loyally behind him in 1860. He wrote to General Sherman in 1864 with reference to the contest:

"Indiana is the only important state voting in October, whose soldiers cannot vote in the field. Anything you can safely do to let her soldiers, or any part of them, go home and vote at the state election will be greatly in point. They need not remain for the presidential election but may return to you at once." The results of the 1864 campaign substantiated Lincoln's confidence in the Hoosier state.

Illinois

An interesting but little-known memorandum was written by Lincoln on October 13, 1864. It was a compilation of the states and their electoral votes placed in two columns. Evidently one column, including the New England states and the western states with one exception, listed those whose support he felt confident would be given to him. The other column contained the names of the states which he felt would cast their votes against him.

The total at which he arrived by this compilation was 120 electoral votes for him and 114 for McClellan. In the column of those whose support he felt he would not receive were Kentucky and Illinois. As already indicated, his prophecy about Kentucky was correct but Illinois surprised him by voting for him instead of McClellan.

Possibly Lincoln had based his calculation about the Illinois vote on reports from his home county of Sangamon, which actually gave McClellan a plurality of 380 votes over Lincoln. Back in the election of 1860, Douglas had beaten Lincoln in Sangamon County by forty-two votes, and, in both the 1860 and 1864 elections, the candidates for governor on the Republican tickets ran ahead of Lincoln.

We are told, by those who were with Lincoln at the time the 1860 election returns were being received, that the favorable announcement of the vote of his own precinct in Springfield gave him more pleasure than any other election report. At the early beginning of his political career and at the climax of his achievements he was honored in his own city and among his own people by complimentary votes which contradicted the old familiar proverb.